

# **Living Experience & Zero Suicide**

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# Introduction

I am Jess (she/her) and I love to talk about suicide! I am a mad, queer, feminist, suicide attempt survivor and care worker, and am the Director of Program Development at Rocky Mountain Crisis Partners (who provides the statewide crisis and peer lines, RAINN hotline, Colorado Lifeline, and others). I am located in so-called Denver [land stolen from the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Nuu-ahga-tuvu-pu (Ute), Očhéthi Šakówiŋ (Sioux)]. I have spent my career creating pathways to intersectional, justice-based, emotional support for marginalized communities, and believe mutual aid, disability justice, abolitionist, and other liberation ideologies are integral to solve the problems that lead to suicide. My work has been featured in in [USA Today](#), PEOPLE magazine, [Mad in America](#), [Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Centers](#), [Postvention in Action: The International Handbook of Suicide Bereavement](#), [Crisis](#), [Death Studies](#), and [The Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#). I collaborate on a videocast called [Suicide 'n' Stuff](#) with Dese'Rae Stage from [Live Through This](#). I hold the Lived Experience seat on Colorado's Suicide Prevention Commission, and was the winner of the 2019 American Association of Suicidology Transforming Lived Experience Award, and the 2019 Cookie Gant and Bill Compton LGBTQIA Leadership Award for Excellence in Promoting Diversity and Inclusion Award.





# Agenda

- Types of Lived/Living Experience
- Defining Meaningful Involvement
- Preparing for Involvement
- Implementation & Evaluation
- Common Pitfalls
- Comments, Questions, Concerns



# Types of Lived/Living Experience

Who Are We Talking About?





# Types of Lived/Living Experience

Suicide Loss  
Survivor

Friends/Family of  
Suicide Attempt  
Survivor

Suicide Attempt  
Survivor

Experiencing  
Ongoing Suicidal  
Thoughts/Behavior

Currently Receiving  
Services

Psychiatric Survivor

Peer Worker


Worker with  
Lived/Living  
Experience

# Defining Meaningful Involvement

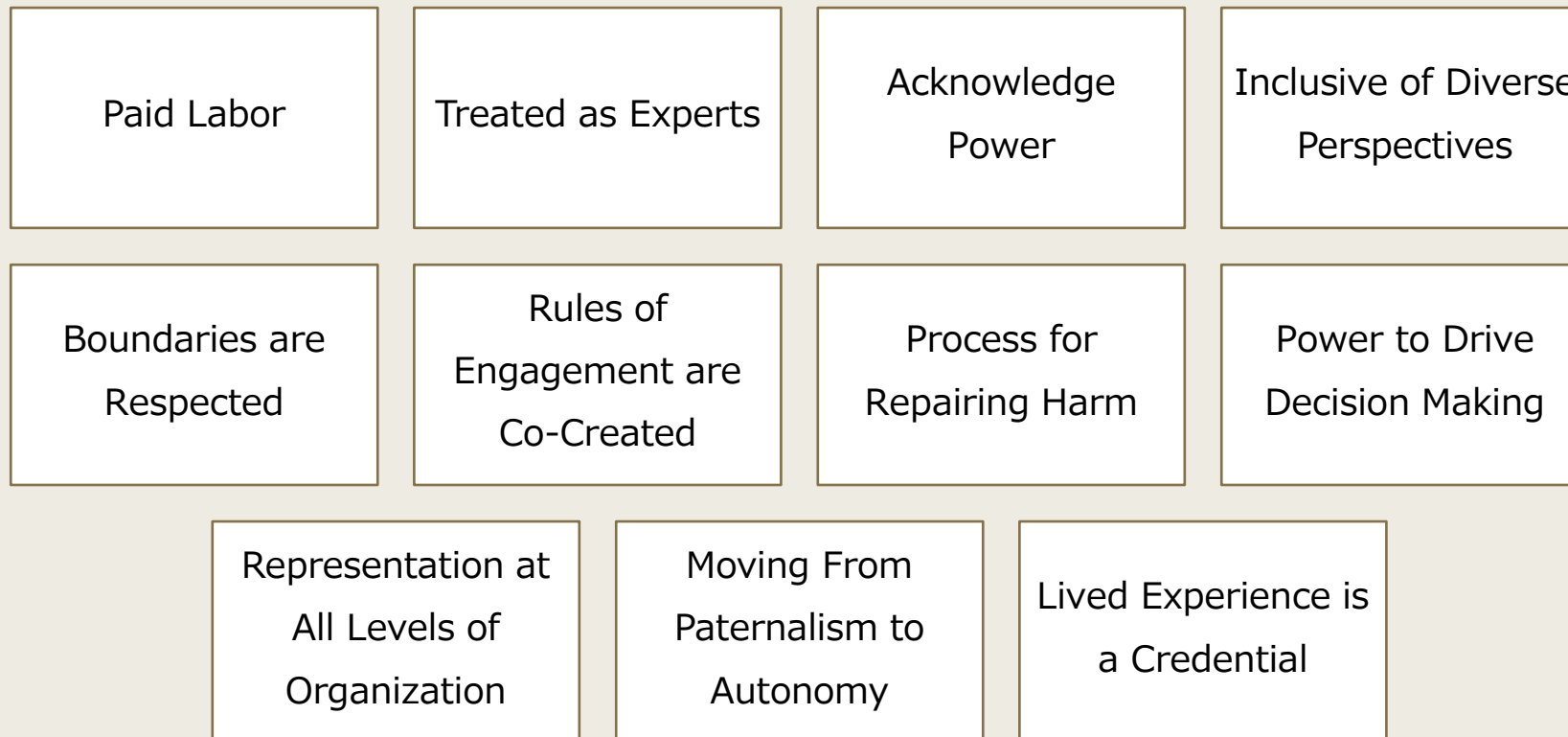
What will people with lived  
experience *do*?







# Characteristics of Meaningful Involvement





# Roles for People with Lived/Living Experience

Program  
Evaluators

Board of  
Directors

Advisory Board  
Members

Research Team  
Members

Peer Workers

Community  
Outreach





## **Roles for People with Lived/Living Experience**

**Any Role or Position  
within Your  
Healthcare System**

# Preparing for Involvement

Creating a Safe-Enough Culture  
and Planning for Critique





# Preparing Your Organization

Plan for  
Involvement

Train Staff

Support &  
Incentivize Self-  
Disclosure

Create Orientation  
& Training

Use Shared  
Language

Identify  
Ombudsman

Design Formal &  
Informal Feedback  
Mechanisms

Create Clear Goals



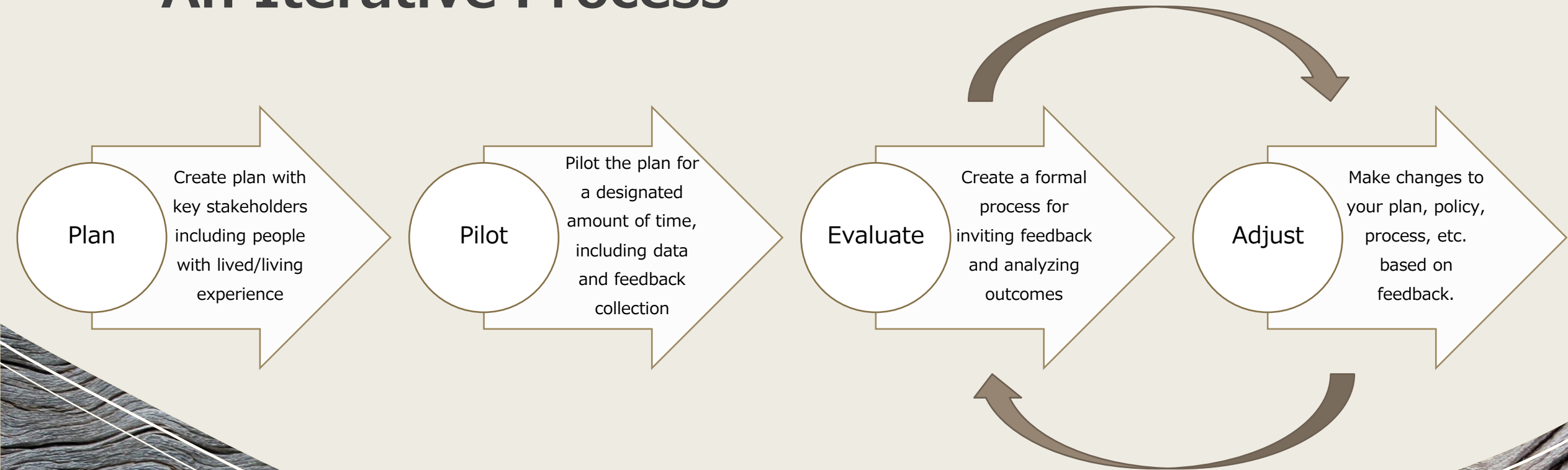
# Implementation & Evaluation

Try, Reflect, Try Again





# An Iterative Process



# Common Pitfalls

Perspectives and Practices That  
Cause Problems





# People with Lived/Living Experience Can Be Harmed When We...

Are Dishonest  
About Power

Lack Accountability  
Processes

Tokenize Them

Only Select People  
Who Agree with Us

Fragilize Them

Involve Them in  
Coercion

# Practices to Resist

Peer Workers Reporting  
to Clinical Staff

One Person  
Representing All  
Lived/Living Experience

Segregating Lived/Living  
Experience Initiatives

Perfectionism

Clinical Fragility

Resistance to Critique

Co-Optation





**Peer support is a culture of healing. As people practice new ways of “being” through even the most difficult times, possibilities for breaking old patterns and creating new opportunities are endless. Crisis then just becomes another word for redefining our experience and ourselves so that instead of needing to be locked up, we can begin to break free.**

Sheri Mead, Intentional Peer Support